



## State of Connecticut

### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM A. HAMZY**  
SEVENTY-EIGHTH DISTRICT

**DEPUTY REPUBLICAN LEADER**

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
ROOM 4204  
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591  
CAPITOL: (860) 240-8700  
TOLL FREE: 1-800-842-1423  
FAX: (860) 240-0207  
E-MAIL: William.Hamzy@housegop.ct.gov

**MEMBER**  
BANKS COMMITTEE  
ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE  
EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE NOMINATIONS  
COMMITTEE  
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
REGULATIONS REVIEW COMMITTEE

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Good afternoon Chairs Slossberg and Spallone, Ranking Members Hetherington and McLachlan, and Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. Today, I am here to testify on the two bills before the committee, the Governor's Bill, 5021, and the GAE Committee's Bill, 5022, both dealing with revisions to the Citizens' Election Program.

While I appreciate both Governor Rell and the GAE Committee putting forth bills to attempt to address the issues the U.S. District Court brought out in its decision, *Green Party of Connecticut v. Garfield*, I am sure you are aware that I and many others feel the election grant funds are better utilized towards lowering our current budget deficit. That being said, I would like to offer some comments regarding certain aspects of the committee bill, specifically the proposed changes to grants, independent and excess expenditures, and supplemental grants.

In regards to election grants under the Citizens' Election Fund, I find it troubling that the GAE Committee's version of the bill reduced grant amounts for all offices, except for the Governor's race. With everyone being held to the same standard except candidates for Governor, I hope the Committee might, at some point during the hearing today, explain the rationale behind this omission. And while I understand the Court's decision in *Green Party of Connecticut v. Garfield* found the independent and excess expenditures portion of the Citizens' Election Program unconstitutional, the Committee's attempt at addressing this with a new format of supplemental grants is equally troubling.

The Committee bill includes several changes that will take affect upon the triggering event of the U.S. Court of Appeals affirming the decision in *Green Party of Connecticut v. Garfield*. One such change is a provision under Section 3, eliminating matching grants for independent and excess expenditures, and replacing them with supplemental contributions and grants for candidates who are eligible for them. According to the bill, legislative candidates are only eligible for these supplemental funds if they are running in an open seat race or in a "competitive district", where the difference between the two top vote getters is less than 10% in any two of the last three primaries or elections.

I would like to throw out a few hypotheticals to highlight the issues I see with the language as written. Take for example a State Representative race in an open seat: if a participating candidate is eligible to raise supplemental contributions, they may only raise a maximum of \$9,000, which in turn, will be matched by a supplemental grant of that same amount. This would give the candidate a maximum of \$18,000 in supplemental funds. Not only does this require a candidate to spend more of his or her time asking supporters for money, which I have no problem with, but it also creates an unlevel playing field because the opposing candidate is free to be out campaigning while the other candidate is forced to raise funds to keep up. I do not see how this candidate could compete with a millionaire non-participating opponent.

Now, let's say the State Representative race is not an open seat race, but rather is a race in the newly proposed "non-competitive district." Under that definition, the Committee has purposely left out hotly contested races and those candidates ability to receive supplemental grants. I would be interested to know how the Committee arrived at this proposal as fair and a level playing field for candidates. It seems to me that the "non-competitive district" language does not allow for the instances where races, not initially thought of as competitive, can become hotly contested due to issues that arise within the district during that election. Or perhaps issues on a national level are finding their way close to home, and making this race more competitive, you just never know. As you all are acutely aware of in this day and age, the political and campaign climate can change quickly, yet under the Committee bill this is not contemplated—neither candidate in the so-called "non-competitive district" would be eligible for supplemental fund. This is simply unworkable, impractical and unfair to candidates.

Finally, I would like to talk a little more about the proposed process of raising supplemental contributions for those candidates who are eligible. If a donor maxes out his or her contributions to a participating candidate, the candidate must now seek contributions for supplemental grants elsewhere. Presumably, this defeats the entire purpose of the Citizens' Election Program by forcing candidates to spend a bulk of their time asking people for money, instead of listening and learning from their constituency. Let's take the Governors race as an example to highlight the issues with this proposal: *(let me stress these are the absolute best scenarios)* a gubernatorial candidate will be allowed to raise an additional \$1.5 million in supplemental contributions. The candidate is now tasked with trying to find an additional 15,000 people to give him or her \$100 each. This will become a seemingly impossible task especially after that "participating" gubernatorial candidate has already had to find 2,500 people to contribute \$100 each to assist that candidate to even qualify for an election grant under the Citizens Election Program.

Although from my perspective I firmly believe we should eliminate the grants altogether in order to close the growing hole in our state budget, I felt it necessary to highlight what I perceive to be flawed proposed changes to the program that will further create an unlevel playing field for all candidates that may choose to participate in the Citizens Election Program in the future should it continue.

Thank you providing me the opportunity to highlight some of the concerns and issues I have with the proposed Committee Bill. I look forward to open dialogue with the Committee and the General Assembly as a whole as this bill and these issues move through the process.